

The Lois and Milton Y. Zussman Activity Center Connections

A newsletter for the Activity Center Clients by the Activity Center Clients

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And

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Individual Highlights:

The Power of Work 1

Jill's Story 1

Fran's Story 2

Steve's Story 2

John's Story 3

Lora's Story 3

David's Story 4

Gail's Story 5

Debra's Story 5

Acknowledging Each

Other 6

Puzzle Page 7

The Power of Work by Debbie Safe

Some people define themselves by it and it is often one of the first questions we are asked when we meet new people. It is a place in which we will spend the majority of our time over the course of a lifetime. It structures our day, gives us a sense of normalcy and provides us with an income: **“work.”** Whether it is paid employment or volunteer work we take pride in being productive and contributing to society. Working gives us purpose, recognition and enhances our self esteem.

For those with mental illness the same principles apply. So many mental health consumers have lost their employment, particularly at the onset of the illness. Sometimes they are unable to return to their chosen field.

Jill's Story

Debbie: “Where do you work? What is your position there? Do you enjoy it?”

Jill: “I volunteer at the Kadima Activity Center. I teach arts and crafts. I also do the photography for special events. The photographs are used to make videos which are shown at the Activity Center. I really enjoy what I do.”

Debbie: “How does your volunteer work

However, most consumers will tell you that they want to work and, given the opportunity, they are likely to succeed in a work setting. Work is a vehicle for focusing on strengths and abilities, “wellness” instead of “illness.” It enhances self esteem, improves quality of life and yields a greater sense of financial independence. It confirms a sense of “normalcy” and it is a powerful tool for symptom reduction. Research bears out the fact that working promotes recovery, enhances social skills, and helps those with mental illness to reclaim their lives. Kadima has long provided encouragement, support and assistance to clients in their quest for employment.

The Kadima Café, a small snack shop in the Activity Center, opened its doors on May 10. As we looked for consumers to staff it the response was overwhelming. Even with the many tasks to be done to run the store, there were more consumers who wanted to work than we could accommodate.

This issue of the “Activity Center Connections” will focus on the “Power of Work.” The following are a series of interviews and personal stories by Kadima clients.

“Work is a vehicle for focusing on strengths and abilities, ‘wellness’ instead of ‘illness’.”

affect your mental health?”

Jill: “After teaching a class I feel really proud. I like to see the smiles on people’s faces when they complete a project. It’s really fun to watch the enjoyment that people experience when they see themselves on the ‘big screen’.”

Fran's Story

Debbie: "Where do you work and what is your position there? How long have you been there?"

Fran: "I work part time at Hollywood Market in Royal Oak. I have been working there for 10 years. I am a bagger and I also do some janitorial work. Jewish Vocational Services helped me get the job."

Debbie: "Do you enjoy your work there?"

Fran: "I do enjoy my work there but sometimes it can be stressful. Customers may be in a big hurry and I don't always bag as quickly as they may expect. I think my co-workers underestimate my abilities because my medication can slow down my response time. But I'm lucky because the bosses like me."

Debbie: "How has your employment affected your mental health?"

Fran: "Working keeps me productive and makes me feel capable and better about myself. I feel more independent and have met friends through work. Friends that I socialize with outside of work. Working has also helped me maintain my sense of humor. Sometimes I can be pretty funny at work and other people laugh at my jokes. Working gives me more confidence in other areas too.

If I can work with the public then I feel that I can do almost anything. There are also financial advantages to working. It allows me to do some things that I couldn't otherwise do. So many people are out of work today that I feel lucky to have a job. Everyone has special talents and I say that if you really want to work, don't be afraid to try."

"Working keeps me productive and makes me feel capable and better about myself."



Kadima Café manager Steve, displays the first dollar he took in at the snack shop

Steve's Story

Debbie: "Where do you work and what is your position there? How long have you been there?"

Steve: "I work in the Kadima Café three days a week. I have been there since the snack shop opened about eight weeks ago. I am a store manager and I am responsible for balancing the daily amount we take in. The inventory sheet has to balance with the cash box."

Debbie: "Do you enjoy your work? How has your job affected your mental health?"

Steve: "I enjoy my work. It gives me a reason to get out of bed in the morning. I know that I am going to be doing something positive. I really enjoy working with the customers and co-cashiers. It has impacted my self esteem in a very positive way knowing that I am appreciated.

The Arts and Crafts group made me a hand painted vase to show their appreciation for my job as a manager of the snack shop. I keep it in my room as a reminder that I really am appreciated."

John's Story

Debbie: "Where do you work and what does your job entail? How long have you been there?"

John: "I work at Kadima with Dale doing maintenance work. I work with him every Wednesday and have been doing it for six weeks. Dale is training me to put up shelves, hang pictures, deal with plumbing problems, and just general maintenance. I used to work in maintenance and in heating and cooling. In the 1980's. I worked as an independent contractor for Kadima."

Debbie: "Do you enjoy your work?"

John: "I do enjoy my work. Dale is a very nice man and it is easy to work with him."

Debbie: "How has work affected your mental health?"

John: "I have asthma and I have learned to adjust my breathing in order to do my work. It makes me feel better that I am achieving something. I enjoy helping Dale out and working on things that other people need. My mom says that I have really grown since

I've been working with Dale."

According to Dale, John's supervisor at Kadima, "John is doing very well and he is quite motivated. He has an outstanding work ethic. I have learned that he has a terrific sense of humor."



"I do enjoy my work. Dale is a very nice man and it is easy to work with him."

Lora's Story by Lora D.

I work at Kadima as the receptionist for an hour, three days a week while Kathy, the full time receptionist, is at lunch or when she takes the day off. I have officially worked at Kadima for five years now but worked at this position for 3 years. Before that I worked as a peer counselor in the Activity Center, doing what David does now, for the other two years.

I enjoy my work as the receptionist. It gives me a sense of purpose in life. A

purpose knowing that even though I have a mental illness, I am still employable.

I still struggle with what happens after school. I am going to school to achieve my Bachelor's of Arts in Studio Art. I do not know of many people that will hire someone with that kind of degree.

I like the fact that Kadima is really flexible with my schedule for school because each semester my days to attend school changes.

My job has affected my mental health by teaching me the discipline and focus I need to achieve at a job or anything I want to accomplish. As John R. says, "Work is very therapeutic for me because it gets my mind off my problems." I find this is true for me as well. I bet it is also true for many other people in the work force.

According to Kathy, Lora's supervisor at Kadima, "She is very helpful and organized. I can always count on her to follow through with any request.

"My job has affected my mental health by teaching me the discipline and focus I need to achieve at a job or anything I want to accomplish."

“Hey, It’s a Living” by David Barg

Most experts agree that work is invaluable to people. It provides us income; sure. But in many ways it defines us as no other activity can. Think about it. How many times have you been introduced to someone without the phrase, ‘*So what do you do?*’ being a critical part of the conversation. My guess is not many. It got me thinking. **How much does what I do affect my sense of dignity and self-respect?** Traits those experts say are so important to the human condition. It wasn’t until I attempted to re-enter the work force that I realized just how critical the answer might be.

In the ‘Before Time’ (*Before the permanent nature of my Bi-Polar disease changed forever my concept of employable.*) I had a career. No, I had cultivated a career. I had dignity and a well developed sense of self. I...

- Had the respect of my colleagues
- Was sought after for the application of my expertise

- Keynoted as a speaker at company and industry seminars
- Had a shelf full of certificates, letters, and kudos recognizing my accomplishments

You know what happened next don’t you? My colleagues got to whispering about what had befallen me in dark office corners. No one wanted my name associated with a body of work. The phone stopped ringing. The items on my shelf gathered dust. My career faded, like my former self, into history.

I had enough money coming in to meet my family’s needs, if on a modest level. But, I was miserable. I had no mission. I knew I needed a job. Moreover, I needed to get over the loss of my career and begin anew. At first, I was reticent to become under employed or work at a job that I felt was beneath my capabilities. I also feared that no one would hire me as I had become damaged goods.

But someone did hire me. Like the sitcom “*Cheers*” I went each day where everybody knew my name. My mood soared. I got over the underemployment problem. How? I came to realize that whatever my tasks, if I applied myself fully doing the best I could do, that was enough. If I was a street sweeper, then I was going to be the best street sweeper ever.

I’ve added a second shelf to hold all of my kudos.



David has been employed at the Kadima Activity Center for almost 2 years.

“I feared that no one would hire me as I had become damaged goods.”

Gail's Story

Debbie: "Where do you work and what is your position there? How long have you worked there?"

Gail: "I work at the Kadima Café as a manager. I have been there since it opened. We sell different products, do inventory, stock shelves, and balance the account book."

Debbie: "Do you enjoy your work? How has your job affected your mental health?"

Gail: "I enjoy it a lot and I am really into what I'm doing. It has given me a purpose and structure. I enjoy working with my co-workers and the customers."

Debra's Story

Debbie: "Where do you work? What is your position? How long have you been there?"

Debra: "I'm an assistant job coach at Freedom Adult Foster Care; I have been working there for five and a half years. I help people with disabilities in the community with basic skills like personal safety and prompting. I also do some office work and deliver meals

for Meals on Wheels. I do some public speaking about people with disabilities and the challenges they have."

Debbie: "Do you enjoy your work? How does your job affect your mental health?"

Debra: "I like my job because I enjoy helping people. I feel that I am successful at what I do."

Kadima Clients at Work...



Rifka purchases a danish in the Kadima Café.



Lora is busy working as the desk receptionist at Kadima.

**The Lois and Milton Y. Zussman
The Activity Center
Connections**

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Acknowledging Each Other

Steve V: “I’d like to acknowledge Debbie and David for their hard work. I also want to acknowledge David for his cooking. Special acknowledgement to all the cashiers at the Kadima Café.”

Steve J: Thanks again to David for taking me under his wing in the kitchen.”

Helen: “I’d like to acknowledge Steve for his faithfulness in getting the Kadima Café up and running. I’d also like to thank Kadima for the camping trip.”

Alice: “Thanks to Debbie for being here every day.”

Rifka: “I want to acknowledge the people who work at the snack shop.”

Janice: “I would like to recognize Debbie for her hard work and determination.”

Denice: “Thanks to Renee and Janice for doing me favors.”

Marc: “Thanks to Kadima for putting a roof over my head.”

Nancy: “Thanks to Kadima staff for giving us a chance to express our feelings and cheering us up when things aren’t going well!”

Herbert: “Thanks Kadima for the Sunday Brunch outings.”

Robin: “Thanks to Janette for being sensitive and responsive to situations that come up.”

John: “I would like to thank Steve for his hard work in the snack shop. He is always so friendly.”

Jill: “Thanks to all the staff who took us to camp. One “grand” thank you to the Grands.”

Debbie: “Special thanks to all the cashiers at the Kadima Café and to the store managers, Steve and Gail. You are all doing a great job. Special thanks to Jill and Lora for making the Camp Seagull video. Your creativity and patience are much appreciated.”

Rita: “I’d like to thank everyone for making me feel welcome.”

Lora: “I’d like to thank Jill for letting me be creative with the camp video and trusting me enough to let me go at it and being there for me when I was getting tired of working on it. Thanks for the “shove” and encouragement to finish it. Thanks to Lisa for her unfailing encouragement and backing me up when I get into tight situations.”

David: “I would like to recognize Evan for his devotion to our Shabbat celebrations each week. To ‘Café’ Steve for his commitment to the snack shop. To ‘Baseball’ Steve for his assistance in the kitchen. To Debbie for being Debbie.”

Judy: “Our activity center has grown in participation, energy, creativity, and wellness in the past year. Debbie, the activity center coordinator, has brought a new level of client involvement from music to art to meal preparation to the café to this newsletter....and then much more. Debbie is an igniter of ideas, a ‘get it done’ person and someone who encourages our clients to grow, try, think and reflect on who they are and what they can achieve. In turn, the clients have responded to Debbie by sampling new activities, by being open to more stimulating challenges and by sharing their feelings and thoughts. Thank you to Debbie and to our clients!”

